

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-11

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FM AMEMBASSY KUWAIT
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C O N F I D E N T I A L KUWAIT 3094

STATE PASS ACDA WASHDC

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: MASS, KU
SUBJ: KUWAITI FMS PURCHASE REQUEST: MORE TOW MISSILES AND LAUNCHERS

REF: (A) 77 KUWAIT 6947, (B) 77 KUWAIT 6679, (C) 77 KUWAIT 3923,
(D) 77 STATE 207984.

1. WE HAVE A LETTER DATED MAY 17, 1978, FROM KUWAITI DEFENSE
MINISTER REQUESTING AN "FMS CASE OFFER" FOR 20 TOW MISSILE
LAUNCHERS, 1350 MISSILES, AND SEVEN GUIDED MISSILE TRAINING
SETS. EMBASSY VIEWS REGARDING THIS REQUEST FOR FMS SALE FOLLOW,
IN THE FORMAT PRESCRIBED IN PARA. 5 E OF REF D.

A. WE HAVE BEEN EXPECTING FOR OVER A YEAR THIS REQUEST FOR
AUGMENTATION OF THE CURRENT KUWAITI TOW INVENTORY (50 LAUNCHERS
AND 1800 MILLILES). WE UNDERSTAND THAT SOME DOZEN OF THE REQUESTED
20 LAUNCHERS WILL BE USED TO REPLACE LAUNCHERS NOW ON HAND WHICH
ARE TO BE INSTALLED ON NEW US-SOURCE APC'S. THE REMAINDER WILL
BE USED TO EQUIP ADDITIONAL INFANTRY UNITS WITH THIS RELATIVELY
CHEAP, PORTABLE SYSTEM, STRENGTHENING THE ARMY'S FIRST LINE OF
DEFENSE AGAINST THE POTENTIAL TANK THREAT FROM IRAQ, WHICH ARMY
PLANNERS HAVE UPPERMOST IN THEIR MINDS. (THE TOW WOULD BE USED
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DEFENSIVELY ONLY; KUWAIT WILL NOT BE IN A POSITION TO INVADE ANY
OF ITS NEIGHBORS DURING THE LIEF OF THESE WEAPONS.) THE KUWAITIS
SEE IRAQ AS THE PRIMARY PRESENT THREAT, NOT ONLY BECAUSE OF LONG-
STANDING UNRESOLVED BORDER ISSUES, BUT ALSO OWING TO IRAQI
IDEOLOGICAL ANTIPATHY TOWARD KUWAIT AND OTHER TRADITIONAL ARAB
REGIMES. KUWAIT HAS ADOPTED A MILITARY STRATEGY OF BUILDING SMALL,
MODERN, RAPID-REACTION FORCES (ESSENTIALLY AIR AND ANTI-ARMOR

DEFENSE, CHARACTERIZED BY A HIGH LEVEL OF FIREPOWER, WHICH COULD HOLD OFF INVADING FORCES FOR A MINIMUM PERIOD UNTIL MILITARY AND/OR DIPLOMATIC AID COULD BE OBTAINED.

B. THE SALE OF ADDITIONAL TOW ASSETS TO KUWAIT WOULD IMPROVE MARGINALLY THE ANTI-ARMOR CAPABILITIES OF KUWAITI FORCES, BUT GIVEN THE ALREADY OVERWHELMING IMBALANCE OF FORCES AGAINST KUWAIT, WITH RESPECT TO ITS LARGER ADJACENT NEIGHBORS, THE "ARMS RACE" IMPLICATIONS ARE NIL.

C. TOW IS A SIMPLE WEAPON WHICH REQUIRES MINIMUM MAINTENANCE AND TRAINING. NO AMERICANS IN ADDITION TO THE ONE MAN TOW TAFT CURRENTLY IN KUWAIT WILL BE REQUIRED TO IMPLEMENT THE SALE. REGARDING THE ROLE OF THE TOW IN KUWAITI MILITARY STRATEGY, WE NOTE THAT THE KUWAITIS ARE MOVING SLOWLY TO SOLVE THEIR LEADING PROBLEM--LACK OF TRAINING MANPOWER TO ABSORB ARMS PURCHASES -- IN THE ESTABLISHMENT OF AN INTEGRATED RAPID REACTION FORCE. ADDITIONAL TOWS COULD BE ABSORBED RELATIVELY EASILY IN THIS SITUATION.

D. THE GOK ALWAYS PAYS CASH; NO US FINANCING WILL BE REQUESTED.

E. THE ECONOMIC IMPACT OF THE SALE ON THE WEALTHY GOK WILL BE NIL.

F. REGARDING THE RELATIONSHIP OF THE PROPOSED SALE TO THE PRESIDENT'S ARMS TRANSFER POLICY, WE ASSESSED LAST JULY IN SOME DETAIL THE GENERAL STATUS AND RATIONALE OF OUR POLICY OF LIMITED ARMS SALES
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TO KUWAIT (REF C). THIS STATUS HAS NOT CHANGED, AND THE POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC RATIONALE SPELLED OUT IN REF C REMAINS VALID. IN ADDITION, THE FOLLOWING FACTORS ARE GERMANE:

I. KUWAITI MILITARY LEADERS WOULD REGARD THE REFUSAL OF THE USG TO PROVIDE ADDITIONAL TOW ASSETS TO MEET KUWAITI LEGITIMATE DEFENSE REQUIREMENTS AS AN INDICATION OF A LACK OF INTEREST IN KUWAIT (IN RELATION TO THE THREAT FROM IRAQ) AND AS A LACK OF US SINCERITY IN ITS RELATIONSHIP WITH THE ARAB WORLD.

II. THE VALUE OF THE FMS SALE OF MORE TOWS TO KUWAIT WOULD BE RELATIVELY LOW IN WORLD-WIDE TERMS, ADDING LITTLE TO THE TOTAL DOLLAR VALUE OF ARMS TRANSFERRED BY THE USG.

2. THE EMBASSY BELIEVES THAT THE GOK REQUEST FOR THE TOWS SHOULD BE APPROVED IN PRINCIPLE AND REQUESTS THAT NOTICE OF SUCH APPROVAL BE PROVIDED TO THE EMBASSY FOR TRANSMITTAL TO THE MOD. PRIOR TO THE ISSUANCE OF OFFER, USLOK WILL CONTACT DOD ON DETAILS.
SUTHERLAND

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